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Jiggy McCue: The Snottle

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Chapter one

My mother has this really disgusting habit. Every time she blows her nose she opens out the hanky and looks at the result. 'Why do you do that?' I yell. 'What do you expect to see in there? A missing earring? A cream cake? A doorway into *Narnia*?'

'I have bad sinuses,' she says.

'I have a bad haircut,' I say, 'but do you catch me looking at it in a hanky? Don't *do* it, please.'

But she carries on doing it, every time. Gets right up my nose.

Why am I telling you this? Because of something that happened to me and Pete and Angie which had quite a lot to do with the stuff that slurps out of hooters. It started with this new girl in class. Her name was Steffany, Steff for short, but everyone – well, the boys – called her Snonker. We called her Snonker because every now and then she would make this great honking noise and this horrible



gloop would leap out of her nose in twin streams. You could never tell when a snonk was coming. There was no warning. There you'd be, eyes closed, pretending you were anywhere but in class, when this hair-raising hoot would rip you out of your seat and turn your heart into a tom-tom. Steff kept a hanky the size of a tablecloth up her sleeve like a spare muscle and usually managed to catch the stuff, but sometimes she missed and it hit her desk, or the floor, or the neck of the person in front. Then she would mop it up, all frantic, like she didn't want anyone to see it. If she'd been my mother she would have been examining her work for an hour.

But it wasn't just the snonking that got us about Steff. Even when she wasn't snonking, she was sniffing. Her nose never seemed to stop running. When the class was quiet, apart from the snores, all you could hear was this sniff-sniff-sniff in the background, and when you looked around you saw that everybody was sitting at their desks with clenched fists. Bryan Ryan stood up once and screamed at her through his rolled-up maths book, and for once he wasn't given detention or sent out. You could tell by the look



in their eyes that the teachers wished they could shout at her too, but they didn't dare in case she sued them.

'Bad cold you have there, Steffany,' Miss Weeks said in one lesson. 'Have you taken anything for it?'

'Like rat poison?' said Pete, who sits next to me.

'I've tried everything,' Snonker sniffled. 'The doctor says it's some sort of allergy, or something in the air round here that doesn't agree with me.'

'You can get pills and sprays for most allergies,' Miss Weeks said.

'I've tried stacks, Miss. Nothing works.'

'Well, let's hope you find something that *does* work – soon.'

None of the boys had spoken to Snonker since she arrived, but a couple of the girls had, including Angie Mint. Angie's our best mate. Pete's and mine. We overlook the fact that she's a girl because we've known her all our lives and have kind of got used to it. But we draw the line, a very thick line, at rubbing shoulders with other girls, so when Angie said we ought to be nicer to Snonker - this was one afternoon on the way home from school - she didn't get a whoop of joy from either of us.



'Nicer to her?' Pete said. 'I couldn't *be* nicer to her.'

'You don't even talk to her,' said Angie.

'And that's as nice as I'm getting. That girl is an alien.'

'Alien?'

'From another school, another town.'

'She'll never be one of us if we don't let her in,' Angie said.

'Let her in?' I said.

'I've been thinking it's about time we expanded the Musketeers.'

We stared at her. '*Bring someone else into the Musketeers*?!'

'Yes. Why not?'

'Well, for starters,' I said, 'we're the *Three* Musketeers.'

'One for all and all for lunch,' said Pete.

'Exactly. You can't have *four* people in the Three Musketeers. Want to borrow my calculator?'

'I feel sorry for her,' Angie said. 'She only has her mum, she's just moved here, and she has no friends.'

'Well she's not having this one,' said Pete.

'Look,' I said suddenly. 'Joggers.'



'Huh?' said Angie.

'Joggers. There.'

Three men in tracksuits were running in step along the horizon.

'What about them?' Angie asked.

'I don't get joggers,' I said. 'They go out all hours, all weathers. They get out of breath, sweat like pigs, look like they're about to keel over any minute, and they wear stupid clothes to do it all in. Can that be *normal*?'

We watched the three joggers running lower and lower into the ground until Pete said:

'Why did they move here anyway?'

'Who?' Angie said.

'Snonker and her old lady.'

'Oh, something about her nan dying and leaving her cottage to Steff's mum and Steff's mum not wanting it and buying another place nearby instead,' Angie said.

'Glad I asked,' said Pete.

She scowled at him. 'How would you like it if you moved to a new town and another school and didn't know a soul and no one spoke to you?'

He beamed. 'Bliss.'

'What are we doing here?' I said.



'You mean, what is humanity's purpose on Earth, in the universe, in the great scheme of things?' Angie said.

'No, I mean how did the three of us get to this rubbish dump?'

We'd strayed from our usual boring route home to another boring one. On our right there was this enormous mountain of rubbish, known locally as the Midden, a kind of unofficial dump, which is uglier than sin and stinks like…well, a rubbish dump. The official council tip is just round the corner, up a dirt track, but a lot of people can't be bothered to go the extra hundred metres and sort their rubbish into the enormous skips provided (each with its own luminous label telling you what you can put in it), so the Midden gets bigger and bigger and stinkier and stinkier all the time.

'What's that?' said Pete.

'What's what?' I said.

'That.'

There was something unusual in the Midden. Something small and round that was watching us go by. We stopped.

'Looks like a grapefruit,' Angie said. 'A green grapefruit.'



'Grapefruits don't have eyes,' I said.

'I said *like* a grapefruit.'

'Not very,' I said.

'The Creature of the Midden,' said Pete.

'What?' said Ange.

'Haven't you heard The Legend of the Creature of the Midden?'

'No.'

Neither had I. 'Where did you hear it?' I asked.

'Hear what?' said Pete.

'The Legend of the Creature of the Midden.'

'I never heard it.'

'You just said you had.'

'No, I didn't. I said, "Haven't you heard The Legend of the Creature of the Midden?" not that there was one.'

'So there isn't any such legend?'

'Not that I know of.'

As I gripped my skull to stop it flying off into space, I heard a voice. Angie's. She was moving slowly towards the thing that didn't look much like a grapefruit with her hand outstretched.

'Here, Creature,' she said. 'Come to Angie.'

'Oh yeah, like it speaks English,' Pete said.

Angie started making these coochie-coo noises,



but the creature just looked suspicious.

'If it snuggles up to you,' Pete said, 'don't expect to come near me.'

'She probably wasn't planning to,' I said.

'Quiet,' Angie said. 'You'll scare it off.'

'Good idea,' said Pete, and started jumping up and down, shouting 'Ooh-waw, eeeee, wo-wo-wo, hoppit-hoppit-hoppit!'

The creature that wasn't the Creature of the Midden pulled back. Muck and rubbish fell like a garage door over the place where it had been.

Angie ran back to Pete, turned his shoulder to mashed potato with a single fist, and flounced homeward without us.



